

oi-a brick through the window

BY WAYNE FLASK

(YES, I HAVE IT IN FOR THE AWARDS)

“B

e diplomatic,” said Lily, pausing to take a sip of her Earl Grey tea. I must have inadvertently made some slight grimace as I pondered her words over my Ethiopian espresso – a novelty even for caffeine addicts like myself. In the sweetest of candy seller tones, Ed proceeded to say: “Well, as much as you can.”

I put on my Boy Scout smile and promised not to stamp, kick or wrong-foot anyone. That’s how *The Bad Seed* was born.

Over the next months and issues, this column (name inspired by Nick Cave’s support band) will bring you my very personal thoughts on the local music scene and related underground, with a watchful eye on what’s happening abroad.

Oh, Lily, I forgot to put in my CV that friends and well-wishers often accuse me of being cynical and/or piercing. Translated: I will “work around” the first promise. Fasten your seat belt, Ed.

So, come the end of 2008, we welcome three parades for our ageing, overweight, pretentious celebrity ensemble: The Malta TV Awards, the Malta Music Awards and the Bay Music Awards. The former, a celebration of our plummeting TV standards, does not interest me at all, even though my full-time job should keep me glued to the telly. The Malta Music Awards and the Bay Awards, however, will come under the scrutiny of this first column, and mostly for the wrong reasons.

As the story goes, the MMAs were a dead and bloated monster up to a few years ago. In 2001, there was a fashion resurrection of the event under the guise of a fashion carnival with opportunities for playback and much flesh-pressing. Nowadays, the formula hasn’t changed much, other than for the presence of two competing events, one organised by Match Music (whose board includes ex-897 Bay and XFM DJ Carlo Borg Bonaci) and the other by 897 Bay, who organise their “in-house” awards. Both hinge strongly on SMS voting (100% in Bay’s case) and draw huge crowds and traffic jams.

It was a pleasant breath of fresh gothic air to see Niki Gravino bag the beauty of five MMAs in a single night, a rare accolade for someone whose music undoubtedly found the canvas wrapping the local scene too claustrophobic, and ripped it off with the proverbial middle fingernail. Equally deserved was Airport Impressions’ “Best Newcomer Award”.

But this whole awards malarkey tends to become a tad baffling and sometimes monotonous. For one thing, the MMAs have reaffirmed the unwritten creed that the usual suspects **must** take some sort of award home.

I still fail to understand how Niki Gravino could win “Best Single”, “Best Song-writing”, “Best Image”, “Best CD Sleeve” and “Best Male Artist” through his elaborate *The Politics of Double Beds* without taking the award for the album itself – which is, basically, all the above minus the sales factor. *Surprisingly*, it went to Ira’s *Fortune Teller*.

The dichotomy between the world of *Politics* and that of *Fortune Teller* is clear for all to see, but without wanting to discredit Ira’s work – *Politics*’ concept and its wholesomeness deserved the trophy. The “Best Album Award” should, for one thing, have nothing to do with sales figures, because that logic would lead us to crown AC/DC as the biggest band in the world.

The other soft trophy of the evening was Winter Moods’ “Legend Award”. My, what a big name. As I told Ivan Grech a few nights later, without disputing their “Best Band Award”, WM are far from the legend stage. They are still in their heyday, years away from retirement, penning a fifth album. For the time being, I can’t picture them as toothless septuagenarian legends sipping herbal tea in a trophy room with 28 platinum gongs.

Ivan nodded half-heartedly, politely reminding me with his usual tranquillity that my views do not represent those of the majority. That’s the whole point.

Flesh-pressing was evident in the steamy BMA backstage, confirming my impression that pique between the “bigger” bands has eased off in the last five years. Here, the awards list was restricted to just six, under the no-furrows-tonight glare of Bay’s headmaster, Terry Farrugia. Airport Impressions confirmed their moment of grace with another two awards, including the new “Artists’ Choice Award” (thumbs up for the concept).

Eventually, eyebrows twitched at Christabelle’s “Best Solo Artist Award” where the obvious main contenders were, once again, Losco and Gravino. The evening ends with an over-zealous floor manager telling off a musician for a prank which left no dead, wounded or shocked.

Overall, however, the BMAs and MMAs are two distant lands, where run-of-the-mill is revered and the unglamorous or revolutionary reviled. SMSs have become more crucial than quality, the first side-effect being that of bands pestering us for our three SMS votes, diminishing the credibility of the coveted trophies to a sympathy contest as their propaganda trudges along.

Arguably, Bay’s award list played it safe and simple, while the MMAs were more expansive. None, however, has catered for the resurgent alternative crowd, with the likes of Areola Treat forgotten or ignored from the nominees’ list. This year, the award for “Remarkable

Album/Single Productions” popped out of the running order again, while the “Music Journalist Category” is never in line for fine pieces of music literature. Likewise, no “Best Radio and Live DJ”, no “Best Live Performance” (as the organisers are too lazy to scout or turn up for gigs, I suspect), no “Best Alternative Act”. There is an alarming lack of depth when it comes to setting the shortlists, and a lot of barrel scraping when it comes to dishing out some of the awards.

I was almost cringing as I watched Carlo Borg Bonaci, just three days before the MMAs, telling Saviour Balzan on *Reporter* that bands are afraid of writing and singing in Maltese. Did you look in the right places?

I’m sure Carlo hadn’t heard of Brikkuni, the band that went on to win the “*Ghanja tal-Poplu*” award on the same night as the MMAs after a performance in fearless Maltese. A closer look at the band and the quality of their *Kuntrabanda* would have made them a sterling nominee on the MMAs list. But... perhaps they are a bit too – what do you call them, *eccentric*?

But there again, a good number of those on MMAs red carpet list will tell you, in not so subdued whispers, that they struggled to get airplay from XFM during Carlo’s tenure.

The obvious defence would be to say that the awards’ parameters allow only for the tastes of the “target audience”. In which case, allow me to cheekily propose a single awards session called the “Malta Casual Radio Listeners Music Award” and, once we’re there, include the “Worst Facial Hair” and “Best Aggrandisement” awards.

Then, please restore the MMAs to their righteous glory as a national event for those who truly love music.

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Bad Seed recommends:



Mali Music

Me And Armini

Crystal Castles